

## A Zambian Town in Colonial Zimbabwe: The 1964 “Wangi Kolia” Strike

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**ABSTRACT:** In March 1964 the entire African labour force at Wankie Colliery, “Wangi Kolia”, in Southern Rhodesia went on strike. Situated about eighty miles south-east of the Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, central Africa’s only large coalmine played a pivotal role in the region’s political economy. Described by *Drum*, the famous South African magazine, as a “bitter underpaid place”, the colliery’s black labour force was largely drawn from outside colonial Zimbabwe. While some workers came from Angola, Tanganyika (Tanzania), and Nyasaland (Malawi), the great majority were from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Less than one-quarter came from Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) itself. Although poor-quality food rations in lieu of wages played an important role in precipitating female-led industrial action, it also occurred against a backdrop of intense struggle against exploitation over an extended period of time. As significant was the fact that it happened within a context of regional instability and sweeping political changes, with the independence of Zambia already impending. This late colonial conjuncture sheds light on the region’s entangled dynamics of gender, race, and class.

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Until the proving and development over the past decade of gigantic coal reserves in Mozambique’s Tete Province, the only coalmine of any significance in central Africa was Wankie, or “Wangi”, since 1980 Hwange, Colliery in north-western Zimbabwe. Aside from scattered references in general histories, the colliery has been the subject of five historical studies, three of which were written by one of the authors of this article.<sup>1</sup> Only one study, a comparative examination of mining disasters, has looked at the period since 1954.<sup>2</sup> It is this

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1. Ian Phimister, “Lashers and Leviathan: The 1954 Coalminers’ Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe”, *International Review of Social History*, 39 (1994), pp. 165–195; *idem*, *Wangi Kolia: Coal, Capital and Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe 1894–1954* (Johannesburg, 1994); and *idem*, “Global Labour History in the Twenty-First Century: Coal Mining and Its Recent Pasts”, in Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labor History: A State of the Art* (Bern, 2006), pp. 573–589. See also Charles van Onselen, “The 1912 Wankie Colliery Strike”, *Journal of African History*, 15 (1974), pp. 275–289.

2. Ruth Edgecombe, “Dannhauser (1926) and Wankie (1972) – Two Mining Disasters: Some Safety Implications in Historical Perspective”, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 13 (1990–1991), pp. 71–90.

omission that the present article seeks in part to address. Wherever possible it does so by engaging with three overlapping historiographies. These comprise Zambian and Zimbabwean labour history, especially as regards questions of class and tribal representation in a context of migration and ethnicity;<sup>3</sup> the relationship between African labour movements and nationalist politics;<sup>4</sup> and the roles played by women in mining communities.<sup>5</sup> An overarching theme is how different ethnic groups lived together, and how they coped with racial discrimination and ethnic segregation. Unfolding in a specific place at a particular time, across an international border in a period of contested decolonization, it is precisely because these processes are both interrelated and contingent, as Frederick Cooper has observed elsewhere, that they deserve special scrutiny.<sup>6</sup>

Based on a wide range of sources, this study draws most heavily on the papers of the Associated Mineworkers of Rhodesia. Covering the strike and its aftermath in detail, these papers are presently privately held. Negotiations are underway for their deposit with the Contemporary Archives Centre of the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. This study also makes use of the papers of Garfield Todd, the Southern Rhodesian politician famous for his opposition to white minority

3. For Zambia see Ian Henderson, "Wage-Earners and Political Protest in Colonial Africa: The Case of the Copperbelt", *African Affairs*, 72 (1973), pp. 288–299; and Charles Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa: Industrial Strategies and the Evolution of an African Proletariat in the Copperbelt 1911–1941* (New York, 1979). For Zimbabwe see, especially, Charles van Onselen's two articles, "The Role of Collaborators in the Rhodesian Mining Industry 1900–1935", *African Affairs*, 72 (1973), pp. 401–418, and "Black Workers in Central African Industry: Critical Essay on the Historiography and Sociology of Rhodesia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1 (1975), pp. 228–246.

4. Among many studies engaging in part or whole with this question, see Robert Bates, *Unions, Parties, and Political Development: A Study of Mineworkers in Zambia* (New Haven, CT, 1971); Elena L. Berger, *Labour, Race and Colonial Rule: The Copperbelt from 1924 to Independence* (Oxford, 1974); Andrew Roberts, *A History of Zambia* (London, 1976); Peter Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour: Mobilization and Political Control on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Oxford, 1975); M.R. Mwendapole, *A History of the Trade Union Movement in Zambia up to 1968* (Lusaka, 1977); Jonathan Hyslop, "Trade Unionism in the Rise of African Nationalism, Bulawayo 1945–1963", *Africa Perspective*, 1 (1986), pp. 34–67; Brian Raftopoulos, "Gender, Nationalist Politics and the Fight for the City: Harare 1940–1950s", *SAFERE: Southern African Feminist Review*, 1 (1995), pp. 30–45; *idem*, "Problematising Nationalism in Zimbabwe: A Historiographical Review", *Zambezia*, 26 (1999), pp. 115–134; and Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996).

5. Notably Valerie G. Hall, *Women at Work, 1860–1939: How Different Industries Shaped Women's Experiences* (Woodbridge, 2013); and Jane L. Parpart, *Labour and Capital on the African Copperbelt* (Philadelphia, PA, 1983). See also Teresa Barnes, "We Women Worked So Hard": *Gender, Urbanization, and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930–1956* (Oxford, 1999).

6. Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), p. 206.

rule, also in private possession, as well as published primary material located variously in the National Archives of Zambia, Lusaka, and the National Archives of Zimbabwe, Harare. The latter includes: key commissions of enquiry; legislative assembly debates; reports of the government mining engineer; colliery and Anglo American corporation annual reports; and various published and unpublished brochures and memoranda about the colliery. Of these, the most useful was a thirty-three-page outline circulated in 1981 of the colliery’s past and present position.<sup>7</sup> Particularly valuable were contemporary newspapers and periodicals, coming from throughout central and southern Africa, and from a variety of perspectives.<sup>8</sup> Interviews were conducted in the early 1990s with black and white miners who worked at the colliery between the 1950s and the 1970s. The transcripts are in the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

The first section outlines the colliery’s origins and the region’s political economy. It traces the history of the colliery from the end of the nineteenth century up to the early 1960s. Claiming that successive colliery companies exploited black miners with a ruthlessness not exceeded in any other sector of central and southern Africa’s mining industry during the colonial era, it argues that the colliery’s contested pasts are most usefully interpreted in the context of transnational political economy. By the first half of the 1960s, economic and political forces were pulling in different directions more strongly than ever before.

The second and third sections focus on the causes, course, and consequences of the strike itself. Particular attention is paid to competing interests within and beyond the sprawling confines of the colliery. A short conclusion attempts to explain the reasons for the strike, and its wider significance. This is done by locating it within the labour historiographies of Zimbabwe and Zambia, as well as alongside the wider themes noted above. Throughout, this case study turns on the contemporary insights of black miners, who, almost from the beginning, understood that the “Colliery stinks – Gu za unka e Malahl’eni”.<sup>9</sup>

## ORIGINS AND TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

Situated about eighty miles south-east of the Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, Wankie Colliery, “Wangi Kolia”, was central Africa’s only large

7. National Archives of Zimbabwe, Harare, [hereafter, NAZ] Library, “Wankie – A Brief Review” (Wankie Colliery Company Limited, 16 December 1981), unpublished.

8. See, especially, *Northern News* (Northern Rhodesia/Zambia); *Bulawayo Chronicle*, *Rhodesia Herald* (Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe); and *Drum* (South Africa).

9. NAZ, NB 3/1/6, Native Commissioner, Sebungwe, to Chief Native Commissioner, Bulawayo, 23 March 1906, transl. by Native Commissioner, Sebungwe.

coalmine for most of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> As such, it played a pivotal role in the region's political economy. Before the opening of the Kariba hydroelectric dam scheme in 1960, the colliery's importance went unquestioned. In the estimation of one commission of inquiry, the dependence of colonial Zimbabwe and its neighbours on the Wankie coalfield was "absolute".<sup>11</sup> Afterwards, too, coal remained of great economic importance, certainly for Southern Rhodesia, if less so for the wider region. Many factories, quite apart from household cooking and heating, were coal-fired, as increasingly was the flu-cured tobacco industry, the colony's biggest earner of foreign exchange.<sup>12</sup>

Registered in London in 1899, the Wankie Colliery Company, in which Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company had been significantly interested from the start, was bought in 1950 by Powell Duffryn Ltd, one of several private companies looking to invest overseas following the nationalization of the British coalmining industry. In 1953 the colliery was bought up by Anglo American, a Johannesburg-based mining conglomerate anxious to safeguard coal supplies for its hugely profitable copper mines in Northern Rhodesia, colonial Zambia. By then, Wankie Colliery actually comprised three separate shafts or collieries: No. 1, which was the original mine; No. 2, which started production in 1927, was closed during the Depression, and restarted in 1937; and No. 3 colliery, which began production in 1953. With projected demand estimated in excess of 5 million tons per annum, Anglo American immediately embarked on a major programme of reorganization and expansion. All production calculations, however, were subsequently overturned by the development of the Kariba hydroelectric dam. No. 1 colliery was temporarily closed, only reopening once domestic Southern Rhodesian annual demand had recovered somewhat in the early 1960s to around 3.75 million tons.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout this period, Wankie Colliery Company was a highly profitable enterprise, regularly paying dividends. As the price of coal was regulated by a price agreement negotiated with the Southern Rhodesian government on the basis of the cost of production plus reasonable profit, the colliery's drive to increase its margins could bring it into conflict with the state, if the latter refused to play along. This was the case in 1957, when the government debated Wankie Colliery's wish to increase the price of coal. Although "there were no legal grounds for demanding it", ministers were informed that the colliery company had intimated that officials

10. R.L.A. Watson, "The Geology and Coal Resources of the Country around Wankie, Southern Rhodesia", *Southern Rhodesia, Geological Survey Bulletin*, 48 (1960), pp. 1-38.

11. *Report of the Wankie Coal Commission* (Salisbury, 1949), p. 9.

12. NAZ Library, *Wankie Colliery Company, Annual Report, 1961*, p. 5.

13. *Wankie. Southern Rhodesia's Great Colliery: Commonwealth Mining and Metallurgical Congress 1961* (Johannesburg, 1961), pp. 6-7.

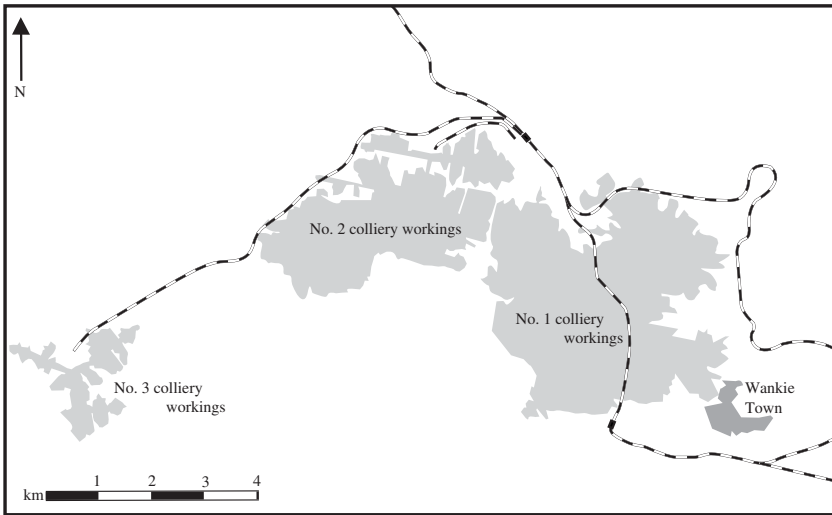


Figure 1. Wankie town and Wankie Colliery, 1964.

“should agree to an interpretation of Clause 20 [of the Price Agreement] which would concede the moral claims of the Company for an increase in the basic cost”. Set against this, as the government realized, was the fact that in 1955 the colliery had paid a 5 per cent dividend, and in 1956 a 10 per cent dividend, on an increased capital of £4.4 million. “The Agreement was giving them [the colliery] a fair share of increased profit and had been designed as an incentive to further production”, ministers agreed. “If the Company felt strongly about the matter it should proceed to arbitration which the Government were quite prepared to face.”<sup>14</sup> This was exactly what the colliery company did, but for once its confidence was misplaced. Its request was denied.<sup>15</sup>

#### THE WANKIE LABOUR FORCE

Unable to raise the price of coal at will, the company kept expenditure on its black labourers within strict limits. In the first place, it reduced the numbers employed. From a peak of about 9,500 in 1953, the African workforce had fallen to 5,577 by 1962. In 1963 underground and surface workers totalled 4,906. This was achieved partly by shedding workers when non-core operations such as the brickworks were sold off, and partly through what

14. Todd Papers, Cabinet Minutes, 9 May 1957. These papers are in the possession of Judith Todd, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

15. *Ibid.*, 17 December 1957.

the company termed “the better utilisation of labour”.<sup>16</sup> Such expenditure as there was on welfare was explicitly directed towards “administration, security, health and hygiene purposes”.<sup>17</sup>

In the past, and indeed until the mid-1950s, the colliery had deservedly acquired a dreadful reputation for the appalling conditions in which its black miners worked and the casual brutality with which they were treated.<sup>18</sup> These conditions were now mitigated if not eliminated, and discipline and control modernized, at least by the standards of the Southern Rhodesian mining industry if not those of the Zambian Copperbelt. “We have worked towards setting things right on the basis that 25 percent to 30 percent of the Company’s African employees would be provided with married accommodation”, the colliery company’s chairman reported at the end of the 1956 financial year.

We also decided that in the interest of both health and control, single Africans should be fed by the Company rather than be given dry rations and allowed to cook for themselves. The commissioning of these new communal kitchens has undoubtedly resulted in a considerable improvement in efficiency at work and in general health. [...] These endeavours have undoubtedly resulted in a healthier, happier and more efficient labour force.

But try as the colliery company might, it could never be sure that “improvements will have placed the Company beyond any danger of labour unrest, because our labour force is inevitably open to influence from outside sources. We must, therefore, continue to ensure that the welfare of our African employees is under constant review.”<sup>19</sup>

Similar claims were made in successive years. In 1957, the better health of unmarried workers was attributed to the “establishment of kitchens in the main compounds of the Colliery”,<sup>20</sup> and in 1961 Wankie was described as “a happy and settled community, a situation [...] encouraged by the provision of social amenities”. A 5 per cent wage increase in 1962 for all the colliery’s black workers helped keep relations “satisfactory”. As the company’s chairman explained in his annual report, “Wankie is an isolated mine, and over the years we have given much attention to the provision of welfare, recreational and sporting facilities.” This, he claimed had been

[...] a considerable factor in helping to build a contented community, but the major factor has been the readiness of our employees to devote much of their spare time to the organisation of club and community activities. We have just completed a hostel to accommodate visiting teams and the African women’s voluntary association have taken over the running of this.<sup>21</sup>

16. NAZ Library, *Wankie Colliery Company, Annual Report, 1963*, p. 9.

17. NAZ Library, *Wankie Colliery Company, Annual Report, 1956*, p. 12.

18. Van Onselen, “The 1912 Wankie Colliery Strike”; and Phimister, *Wangi Kolia*, *passim*.

19. NAZ Library, *Wankie Colliery Company, Annual Report, 1956*, p. 12.

20. NAZ Library, *Wankie Colliery Company, Annual Report, 1957*, p. 8.

21. NAZ Library, *Wankie Colliery Company, Annual Report, 1961*, p. 5.

By the end of the following year, thirty-one better quality houses for more senior African employees had been built, and a number of projects to provide additional amenities undertaken, "including the building of small village swimming baths". The colliery's relations with its black workforce were again described as satisfactory.<sup>22</sup>

Living conditions in the colliery compounds, only recently rebranded as villages, were obviously never as bucolic as suggested in corporate reports. In 1964, independent observers saw things rather differently. "The houses varied from reasonable enough whitewashed cottages, with brightly painted roofs, to gruesome brick hovels [...] bachelors are double-bunked eight to a room."<sup>23</sup> The improvements were anyway also about control, and here the colliery company's attempts to maintain discipline never faltered. It had long been the practice for experienced compound managers, backed up by company police, to use spies, but, as these were invariably exposed sooner or later, additional methods of surveillance and control were employed. Although the growing number of women and children in the various compounds made overall discipline much harder to enforce, black miners themselves were repeatedly denied the right to independent organization. Blaming the last major strike in 1954 on outside political agitators,<sup>24</sup> the colliery company always denied that low wages and poor working conditions had anything to do with that prolonged stoppage.

The view is still emphatically held by the Company that the strike was part of a deliberate political manoeuvre [...] prompted from outside Wankie and had its origin in a combination of political factors and was in all probability staged in protest to Federation and as a "trial of strength".<sup>25</sup>

Apart from a wage increase that it was legally obliged to implement, the colliery company had otherwise rejected out of hand the findings and recommendations of the Native Labour Board appointed immediately after the 1954 strike.<sup>26</sup> It took particular exception to criticism of its system of "tribal representatives", whereby some miners were appointed "tribally" by

22. NAZ Library, *Wankie Colliery Company, Annual Report, 1963*, p. 9.

23. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 33. Though having published only one article on the 1964 Wankie strike, under the title "Behind the Big Strikes", *Drum*, a Johannesburg-based periodical as famous for its pointed criticism of white minority rule as for its sophisticated coverage of black urban life, is a particularly interesting source as it offers a contemporary voice free of racist condescension.

24. Phimister, "Lashers and Leviathan".

25. Associated Mineworkers of Rhodesia Papers [hereafter, AMR Papers], "Notes on Events Leading up to, and the Possible Causes of the Wankie Strike, February 1954", unpubl., Wankie, 7 January 1955, p. 1. The most pressing political factor in the region during this period was the creation of the Federation of Central Africa in 1953, consisting of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland.

26. So-called Native Labour Boards were established in Southern Rhodesia after the 1946 railway workers' strike to determine African wages and conditions of service.

the company to act as intermediaries between workers and management. "The superimposition of Native Industrial Workers' Unions upon existing channels of communication", the Company insisted, "would serve only to weaken the existing medium of negotiation and communication between workers and Management."<sup>27</sup> So far as Wankie's management was concerned, "tribal rulers" reporting directly to the compound manager were the preferred channel of communication. Nor did the situation change significantly after legislation made possible the registration of so-called "multiracial" unions in 1961.<sup>28</sup> The Associated Mineworkers of Rhodesia, a small, white-led and avowedly non-political union, was permitted to establish a presence of sorts at the colliery. By 1964, however, only one in five miners were members.<sup>29</sup>

Convinced that its way was the only way, in the immediate aftermath of the 1954 strike the colliery company briefly toyed with the idea of employing indentured labour as a way of distancing itself from the government collective bargaining initiative noted above. Oblivious to its own unhappy past in this regard a generation previously,<sup>30</sup> the company thought of manning No. 3 Colliery entirely with "indentured Nyasaland [Malawi] natives, the reasons being that they thought indentured labour would be more reliable in times of trouble and could be called upon to keep essential services going". Although the proposal was shelved when wiser heads pointed out that "it might cause tribal trouble [...] especially if the native labour at the other two Collieries were organised on a different basis",<sup>31</sup> the colliery company continued to believe that its interests were best served by drawing on migrant labour from throughout the region. A long-term beneficiary of the southern African regional migrant labour system centred on the Witwatersrand goldmining industry, Wankie Colliery had always drawn by far the greater portion of its black labour force from north of the Zambezi River, from the territories that became Northern Rhodesia, modern-day Zambia, and particularly from its western province, Barotseland, home to the Lozi people.

Reluctant to meet the expense of a fully stabilized workforce, the company favoured the employment of single male migrant labourers. Married workers were in a minority. It was a policy with which successive Southern Rhodesian

27. AMR Papers, "Memorandum Submitted to the Select Committee Appointed by the Southern Rhodesian Parliament on the Native Industrial Workers Union Bill by the National Industrial Council of the Mining Industry", and Appendices, n.d. [February 1955]. This was a government initiative to legalize African trade unions.

28. NAZ Library, *Wankie Colliery Company, Annual Report, 1961*, p. 5. For a wider discussion see D.G. Clarke, "The Underdevelopment of African Trade Unions in Rhodesia: An Assessment of Working-Class Action in Historical Perspective", unpubl., 1974.

29. *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 5 March 1964.

30. Phimister, *Wangi Kolia*, pp. 30–43. See more generally Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900–1933* (London, 1976).

31. Todd Papers, Cabinet Minutes, 3 August 1954.



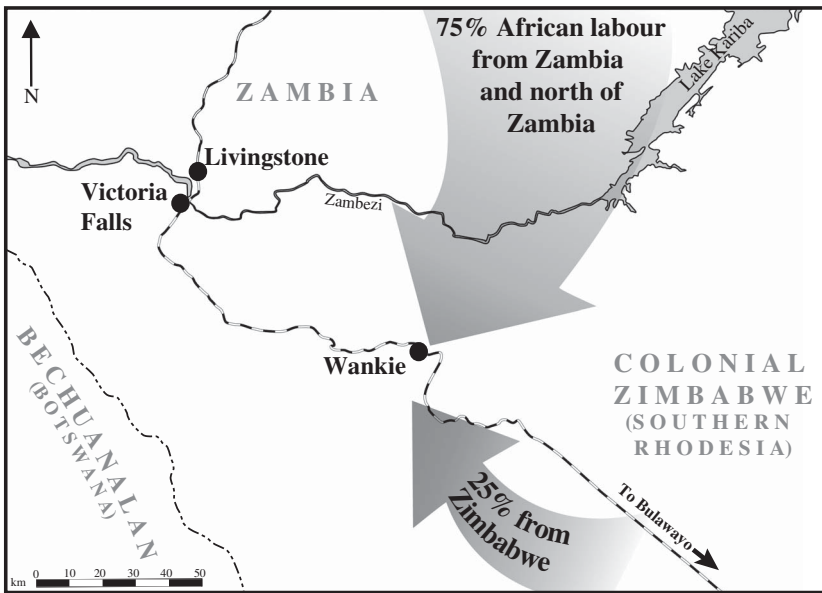


Figure 2. Wankie migration: sources of the colliery's African labour, 1964.

governments had sympathized. “Wankie had problems of its own”, a cabinet meeting was told.

Owing to the barrenness of the surrounding country and the absence of other occupations and industry the usual urban population could not be built up there unless at great expense to the Company. Families had to be supported and housed by the Colliery and there were no facilities for absorbing the adolescent labour thus available.<sup>32</sup>

But whatever cost advantages this had conferred in the past, it now left the colliery dangerously exposed to political upheaval. Fond of warning darkly about imagined political agitation, the company came face to face with its reality.

By the early 1960s, the African nationalist wind of political change acknowledged at the start of the decade by the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, was blowing fiercely through central Africa.<sup>33</sup> Powerful enough to sweep away the short-lived Central African Federation of the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland (1953–1963), it was set to drive all before it north of the Zambezi. Nyasaland was about to become independent as

32. *Ibid.*

33. For Macmillan's acknowledgement in 1960 of African nationalism as a “political fact”, see especially Larry J. Butler and Sarah Stockwell (eds), *The Wind of Change: Harold Macmillan and British Decolonization* (Basingstoke, 2013).

Malawi in July 1964 and Northern Rhodesia, under Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP), was set to follow suit as Zambia some three months later. Southern Rhodesia's white settlers, who for the previous forty years had enjoyed a significant measure of internal self-government, were determined to go their own way, however. Following the election in December 1962 of the extreme right-wing Rhodesian Front, and Britain's absent-minded award at the Victoria Falls conference in July 1963 of the bulk of the Federation's armed forces to Southern Rhodesia, tensions rose dramatically along the Zambezi River fault line between black nationalist and white-ruled Africa.<sup>34</sup> This was the increasingly fraught political background to the strike that convulsed Wankie Colliery in March 1964.

#### THE STRIKE OF 1964

The first overt signs of trouble erupted on the afternoon of Sunday, 1 March. A small open-air meeting of the Associated Mine Workers of Rhodesia (AMR), a multiracial, white-led union enjoying government recognition at a time when most African trade unions were either unregistered or banned,<sup>35</sup> was taken over by non-members, many of them women. Official speakers were unable to make themselves heard above shouts for money in lieu of the food rations distributed by the colliery company to married workers.

Consisting mainly of maize meal, meat, bread, and sugar, rations were issued from stores in each of the three colliery townships. But not only was the meat of such poor quality that some white settlers admitted they, too, would strike if they were forced to eat it,<sup>36</sup> quite often it did not reach those for whom it was intended. As one miner's wife, Ma-Nyambe Sitali-Wasamunu, remembered later, "Some officials sometimes abused distribution. There were times when workers came back from work and found that all the rations had been shared [...] hence the call for money in place of food rations."<sup>37</sup> The meeting broke up in uproar when a woman who had insisted that "she was satisfied with the rations because she was

34. See variously Philip Murphy (ed.), *British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B Volume 9: Central Africa Part 2: Crisis and Dissolution 1959-1965* (London, 2005); David Mulford, *Zambia: The Politics of Independence 1957-1964* (London, 1967); Larry W. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia: White Power in an African State* (Cambridge, MA, 1973); and John R. Wood, *The Welensky Papers: A History of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (Durban, 1983).

35. For details of the colony's restrictive industrial conciliation legislation, see Theodore Bull (ed.), *Rhodesian Perspective* (London, 1967), pp. 109-115. See also C.M. Brand, "Politics and African Trade Unionism in Rhodesia since Federation", *Rhodesian History*, 2 (1971), pp. 89-109.

36. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 33.

37. Interview, Ma-Nyambe Sitali-Wasamunu, 10 February 1991, transl. from Lozi by M. Mulabela.

sure of getting her food for her family" was set upon by other women and chased through the village. Taking refuge in the ration store, she was rescued by the compound manager and driven by car away from No. 2 Colliery. The remaining crowd of women then proceeded "to break up the store and obstruct the male single employees from obtaining food from their dining room".<sup>38</sup> Mine security police responded by firing tear gas to disperse the women.<sup>39</sup>

Overnight, No. 2 Colliery's black workforce, including the AMR's African members, decided to go on strike. A large crowd, comprising as many women and children as men, gathered in front of the colliery entrance. Attempts by Wankie's general manager and other officials to address the gathering were howled down. After some hesitation, a delegation of ten people, six of whom were women, were granted a meeting with management. The delegation was dismissively informed that grievances would not be discussed until the strike was called off.<sup>40</sup> When told that the delegation had failed to obtain anything more than a promise from management that complaints about the quality of meat rations would be looked into once the strikers had returned to work, the meeting ended "in disorder, with UNIP slogans being shouted and sung",<sup>41</sup> a first sign that support for Zambia's United National Independence Party played a role in the strike. A procession led by women then marched to No. 1 Colliery, "where they invaded the kitchen, threw sand and water in the food, ripped open mealie [maize] sacks and stoned the big, gloomy-looking ration building".<sup>42</sup> As Saela Mulemba recalled, "UNIP advised us. We demonstrated at the offices of the compound manager and demanded that African workers also be given money in place of food rations. We shouted at the compound manager and called him names for not heeding the demands of the people."<sup>43</sup>

On leaving, they were joined by black miners coming off shift. No. 1 Colliery was now also on strike. By the following day, Tuesday, 3 March, the strike had spread to No. 3 Colliery. A large crowd, once again including many women and children, refused to listen to committee members from the minority Associated Mineworkers of Rhodesia trade union urging them to return to work. Later that same day, AMR president, Howard Bloomfield, described by a *Drum* reporter as "a big man from an English coalmining area [who] lonewolfed about the compounds, but with little influence",<sup>44</sup> and local AMR leaders were again prevented from speaking.

38. AMR Papers, Report, "Wankie Colliery Strike from Monday 2nd to March 9th, 1964", p. 1.

39. *Northern News*, 5 March 1964.

40. *Rhodesia Herald*, 4 March 1964.

41. AMR Papers, Report, "Wankie Colliery Strike", p. 2.

42. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 33.

43. Interview, Saela Mulemba, 12 March 1991.

44. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 33.

"My Committee and I were lucky to escape injuries ourselves", wrote Bloomfield, "as the mob tried to overturn the car we were in and dented it with weapons".<sup>45</sup> Led by people wearing UNIP badges, the crowd then set about damaging mine buildings and machinery. There was little that the heavily outnumbered local police force could do, beyond watch from a distance, as large groups of men, women, and children roamed the streets well into the night.<sup>46</sup>

Over the next twenty-four hours, as unrest intensified, the number of strikers swelled. Although more than half the afternoon shift turned up for work at No. 1 Colliery, attitudes hardened on their return to surface. Earlier on Wednesday, 4 March, a large crowd of mainly women and children had staged a sit-down protest outside the No. 1 Colliery compound office, "singing UNIP songs and giving the party's fluttering hand sign".<sup>47</sup> Reinforced by units brought from Bulawayo, the nearest large city, and latterly from the capital, Salisbury (modern-day Harare), the police decided to move in. They began by arresting a man, subsequently identified as not employed by the mine, "for addressing a UNIP women's gathering". Baton charges were made to clear the area and tear gas was used.<sup>48</sup> In turn police were met with stones fired by small boys with catapults, "and when one policeman was cornered by the angry crowd, they opened fire, wounding two men".<sup>49</sup> Outraged miners returning to the townships called on other workers, including shop assistants and domestic servants, to join them.<sup>50</sup> So far as Wankie Colliery's black workers were concerned, the strike was now total.

Well before that point was reached, the colliery's white miners, helped by office staff and other settler volunteers, tried to keep coal production going.<sup>51</sup> Wankie's South African owner, the Anglo American Corporation, also mobilized white workers from other mines under its control in Southern Rhodesia. It did so with the full backing of the authorities in Salisbury. Insisting that the strike was illegal because arbitration procedures had not been followed, the government declared the colliery to be an essential service. It promptly placed Dakotas of the Royal Rhodesian Air Force at Anglo American's disposal. Just as dusk was falling on the evening of Tuesday, 3 March, the first of these venerable aircraft disgorged 25 white miners on to Wankie's dusty, unlit landing strip. Another 100 skilled workers from Salisbury, Gwelo (Gweru), and Fort Victoria

45. AMR Papers, Report "Wankie Colliery Strike", p. 3.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Northern News*, 4 March 1964.

48. *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 4 March 1964.

49. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 33; and *Northern News*, 5 March 1964.

50. AMR Papers, Report "Wankie Colliery Strike", p. 5.

51. *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 3 March 1964.

(Masvingo) were due to arrive the following morning. "A spokesman for the management stressed that the miners were not coming as strike-breakers. 'They are here to keep essential services going. They are from copper mines owned by the company'."<sup>52</sup> "In the spirit of pioneer days", reported the *Sunday Mail*,

[...] the [white] people of Wankie are pulling together – and enjoying it. Clerks have put down their pens to take up shovels, plumbers are wielding picks down the mine and women are doing jobs which before the strike they left to their houseboys. All are volunteers and not one receives a penny for their work.

Even the town's Anglican vicar did his bit at the company transport depot, "filling up trucks between his regular calls to the hospitals and other church duties". The Reverend G. Howard confessed: "I would have liked to go down the mine, but they wouldn't let me".<sup>53</sup>

At the end of each truncated shift, Wankie's white miners and volunteers alike returned to racially segregated amenities and housing. The low roofed bungalows set in spacious grounds enjoyed by white miners were very different from even the best housing reserved for the handful of senior African staff, and far removed from the overcrowded cottages and barracks occupied by most black miners. In former times, white miners' encounters with the colliery's authoritarian management were bruising enough, but by the 1950s and 1960s almost all settlers saw themselves as whites rather than workers, as a privileged aristocracy of labour. As one white miner remembered it, "life on the mine was superb [...]. We were just fat, happy cats in the sun."<sup>54</sup> Even if assaults by white miners on black workers were no longer as common as they had been in the recent past,<sup>55</sup> racial prejudice was rife. Voting solidly in the December 1962 election for the Rhodesian Front candidate,<sup>56</sup> many of the colliery's white miners staunchly supported white minority rule and the concomitant ideology. The AMR's self-conscious "multiracialism" rarely survived contact with the wider world beyond the immediate workplace. Striking black miners were on their own precisely because of the threat they posed to the white "Rhodesian way of life". The Minister of Mines understood this political fact only too well when publically thanking white miners for keeping essential production going.<sup>57</sup> For whites, the colliery was a very different place from the one experienced by black miners.

52. *Rhodesia Herald*, 3 March 1964.

53. *Sunday Mail*, 8 March 1964.

54. Interview, A.G. Koen, 16 February 1987.

55. Todd Papers, Cabinet Minutes, 25 May 1954.

56. F.M.G. Willson (ed.), *Source Book of Parliamentary Elections and Referenda in Southern Rhodesia 1898–1962* (Salisbury, 1963), p. 204.

57. *Rhodesia Herald*, 10 March 1964. For white and black miners undercutting each other's strikes, see for Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, Ian Phimister, "White Miners in Historical Perspective: Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1953", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 3 (1977),

Whereas white miners from Wankie and elsewhere could be mobilized easily, attempts to persuade the colliery's black miners to return to work failed. Repeated calls by the AMR's president, backed up by local AMR branch officials, for an end to the strike fell on deaf ears. A message from the general manager broadcast over the public address system covering the three colliery townships was ignored. His claim that miners' families were going hungry because of the strike was dismissed as manifestly untrue. Four days into the strike no one was starving. Miners were described as "buying heavily [...] from three local stores" to feed themselves and their families, some 9,000 people in total.<sup>58</sup> As late as Thursday, 5 March, reporters could see for themselves that there was still enough food. Admittedly, strikers "carefully counted their mealie [maize] cobs and the richer often helped the poorer with food [...] [and] some sold property to buy food", but for all that they had "no union, no official leaders, no meetings allowed, they were surprisingly solid".<sup>59</sup>

Nor did black mineworker solidarity waver in the face of threats by the settler government. Rushed to Wankie from Salisbury by a special RRAF flight on the morning of Tuesday, 3 March, the Southern Rhodesian Minister of Labour made three broadcasts over the public address system. Strikers were bluntly informed that they were acting illegally. "I must tell you that the Government is quite determined to uphold the law, and in terms of the law, the management is right to refuse to negotiate with you until you return to work." Before flying back to Salisbury the next day, the minister met the officers in charge of police operations, and mine management. He also found time to see the leaders of the two registered unions represented at Wankie, the Associated Mineworkers of Rhodesia, and the Salaried Staffs' Association.<sup>60</sup> No attempt was made to open negotiations with the striking miners.

But as the long, hot days wore on, police reinforcements continued to arrive. Speaker vans criss-crossed the townships ordering people to keep off the streets and stay indoors. These instructions were enforced by the night-time deployment of riot squads.<sup>61</sup> By the weekend of 7–8 March, journalists covering the strike were convinced that it had lost momentum.<sup>62</sup>

pp. 187–206; for Northern Rhodesia/Zambia, see Johan Frederik Holleman and S. Biesheuvel, *White Mine Workers in Northern Rhodesia 1959–60* (Leiden, 1973); and for South Africa, see Frederick A. Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa* (London, 1976).

58. *Sunday Mail*, 8 March 1964. The three local stores were outside the colliery complex, and run by commercial retailers.

59. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 33.

60. *Rhodesia Herald*, 3 March 1964. See also Southern Rhodesia Information Services, Press Statement 216/64/DER, Minister Addresses Wankie Strikers. The Salaried Staffs' Association was a compliant grouping of technicians and middle managers.

61. *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 5 March 1964.

62. *Ibid.*, 7 March 1964.

From the start, the strike had been strongest in No. 2 Colliery, always identified as the "hard core of the strikers";<sup>63</sup> miners at the other two collieries had only walked out in the face of police brutality, and indeed power-station workers never joined in at all.<sup>64</sup> Although waverers were kept in line by threats and beatings,<sup>65</sup> commitment to the strike varied over time and place. Even at its greatest extent, immediately after police action on Wednesday, 4 March, when tear gas was used on women and children, and striking miners were baton charged and shot at, resolve was hard to sustain for any length of time across the three separate townships surrounding each colliery. The loss of a week's wages mattered a lot to underground workers whose starting pay was £3 17s 6d per month.<sup>66</sup>

Over the weekend, workforce divisions temporarily wiped away by police brutality began to re-emerge. Members of the AMR, usually the more skilled and better-paid workers, told their union representatives that they were prepared to call off the strike. On Friday, the AMR's president, Howard Bloomfield, claimed that there was "every sign that rowdiness is dead. Executives of the union and I received a good hearing by men in No. 3 colliery today." We told them, he added, that "we wanted to speak to men only and not to deal with Umfazis and picanninis. The Africans understood that."<sup>67</sup> However, the tipping point for the "hard core" of strikers seems to have been the arrival of two officials from the Northern Rhodesian (soon to be Zambian) government on Saturday morning. Acting on the instructions of the Prime Minister, and President of UNIP, Kenneth Kaunda, they "urged Northern strikers to return to work".<sup>68</sup> Once miners from Zambia decided to return to work, other strikers quickly followed. On Sunday morning, domestic servants employed by the colliery's white miners, who had a history of taking strike action, began turning up for work.<sup>69</sup> During the rest of the day, the three colliery townships were described as quiet, and by nightfall it was generally agreed that the strike was over.<sup>70</sup> It had lasted for almost exactly one week.

63. *Rhodesia Herald*, 3 March 1964.

64. *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 5 March 1964.

65. *Rhodesia Herald*, 7 March 1964.

66. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 33. "£", "s", and "d" are the abbreviations for pounds, shillings, and pence, the pre-decimal currency system in use in the United Kingdom, many of its colonies, and Commonwealth countries up until the 1970s.

67. *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 7 March 1964. These were derogatory terms for African women and children, respectively.

68. *Northern News*, 9 March 1964.

69. See, especially, Ian Phimister and Brian Raftopoulos, "'Kana sora ratswa ngaritswe': African Nationalists and Black Workers: The 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 13 (2000), pp. 289–324.

70. *Rhodesia Herald*, 9 March 1964.

## AFTER THE STRIKE

On Monday, 9 March, there was a full turnout for the early morning shift. Ignorant from beginning to end of the intentions of its black workforce, top management at the colliery was taken by surprise. But conscious of the fact that nearly 20,000 tons of coal production had been lost owing to strike action, plus the cost of flying in white miners and accommodating them in Wankie's one hotel,<sup>71</sup> it speedily concluded negotiations with AMR officials. With immediate effect, food rations were replaced by cash. Married men would receive 4 shillings and 8 pence and single workers 2 shillings and 4 pence per shift.<sup>72</sup>

Although a company spokesman claimed, "a good atmosphere among all the men",<sup>73</sup> this surely was not widely shared at Wankie. The colliery company in particular exhibited a meanness of spirit when not exuding a sour vindictiveness. While thanking the AMR's president, Howard Bloomfield, in writing for his part in seeking a negotiated end to the strike, all Wankie's general manager could bring himself to enclose in the letter was a cheque for £75 for the union's benevolent fund.<sup>74</sup> A somewhat incoherent reply by Bloomfield in which he "let as many of our people know, both black and white, that we have management, who though at times on opposite sides, do have consideration for us, and what is more, appreciation of circumstances, and it is indeed a pleasure to discuss management of your calibre",<sup>75</sup> may have served merely to confirm Braithwaite in his estimation of the union. Certainly, it gave the company no pause for thought when pressing charges against the AMR's Wankie branch secretary.

Charged with holding an unauthorized and rowdy public meeting, the branch secretary's evidence in rebuttal revealed just how tightly the company attempted to bind its labour force: acknowledged as a "responsible" trade union and one recognized by the government, the AMR was nonetheless obliged to seek the compound manager's permission to hold meetings. If this was forthcoming, meetings had to be held in an open-sided tent, "because the company will not give us a building, for if we had one we could make it really private". But what the company gained by having union meetings more or less in the open where they could be monitored, it lost by having no controlled access to gatherings. People came and went as they pleased. "You can see what a battle it is to keep an eye on

71. *Sunday Mail*, 8 March 1964.

72. *Rhodesia Herald*, 10 March 1964; and *Chamber of Mines Journal*, 6:4 (April 1964).

73. *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 10 March 1964.

74. AMR Papers, T.A. Braithwaite, General Manager, Wankie Colliery Company Ltd, Wankie, to H.B. Bloomfield, President, Associated Mineworkers of Rhodesia, Gwelo [Gweru], 13 March 1964.

75. AMR Papers, H. Bloomfield, General Secretary's Office, Associated Mineworkers of Rhodesia, Gwelo [Gweru], to T.A. Braithwaite, General Manager, Wankie Colliery, Wankie, 23 March 1964.



all people, especially those who make it their business to sneak in", the branch secretary pleaded. When he further denied that "disturbances" had occurred, "only shouting, which is a common thing with the African even in his own home, and is a normal thing at a meeting anywhere trade unions hold their meetings, even with our Europeans at meetings as I well know", the local magistrate had heard enough. The case was dismissed.<sup>76</sup>

Management's post-strike message, though, was perfectly clear. Its line had to be toed at the colliery and its sister mines. At Mangula Mine, from which white miners had been sent to Wankie, AMR members, white and black, were harassed and sidelined. Towards the end of March, Mangula's AMR's branch secretary, Stephen Mugomeya, listed what he termed the "very severe incidents" at the mine.

I have the following to give; (1) tribal chiefs, (2) the anti-unionism urged by the management, (3) union members threatened by the management not to bring their problems through union leaders but through tribal chiefs, (4) lack of understanding the work of union officials by the management, (5) mine management officials are trying to cause trouble so that they could lay the charge to union officials.

Yet however aggrieved Mugomeya was – "the use of tribal chiefs in our mining industry must be abolished; some stubborn managers must be dealt with" – his fundamental conservatism – "law and order in our mining industry must be maintained; illegal strikers must be dealt with" – completely passed management by.<sup>77</sup> No concessions were made. The system of "tribal elders" had long since been discredited and discarded on the Copperbelt. But deaf to miners' rejection of these unrepresentative "rulers", the Wankie Colliery Company persisted in dealing with them. "Unconstitutional", one striker had told the *Drum* magazine reporter, "They are saying we're acting unconstitutionally. But they do not tell us how we can be constitutional and be heard. Can you?"<sup>78</sup>

Both the Southern Rhodesian government and the Chamber of Mines, the industry's corporate voice, were equally determined to show who was still boss. In this, they found support from the Argus Group, controlling the colony's main daily newspapers. One editorial under the heading "Politics and the Wankie Strike", confident that "Rhodesians will echo the thanks sent by the Minister of Mines to those who kept essential production going", wondered "how much importance should be attached to reports of political agitation and the shouting of UNIP slogans?". Answering its own question, the editorial argued that

76. AMR Papers, Harry Thurbron, Evidence, 6 May 1964.

77. AMR Papers, S.T. Mugomeya, Branch Secretary, Mangula [Mangura], to General Secretary and Executive Council, Associated Mineworkers of Rhodesia, Gwelo [Gweru], 19 March 1964.

78. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 33.

[...] any dispute, whether over rations, money or the supply of soap, is capable of being turned into a political dispute by people to whom “politics” is a new and stimulating game. Judgement will have to be reserved on this question. It might be unduly alarmist to suggest that any large body of alien workers in Southern Rhodesia is a potential fifth column. On the other hand the case for employing indigenous labour wherever possible is strengthened.<sup>79</sup>

This was precisely what the government wanted to hear. The authorities in Salisbury had been shocked by the economy’s vulnerability to the industrial action taken by Wankie’s African coalminers, especially when they came from those regions that were already bound for independence. Despite official claims during the strike that there was “no threat to manufacturing industry, farming, hospitals and hotels”,<sup>80</sup> it became apparent the following week just how low stockpiles of coal had fallen.<sup>81</sup> The *Bulawayo Chronicle* reported that the colliery was struggling to get the country’s industry back on its feet. “Yesterday the Colliery’s Bulawayo office switchboard was jammed with telephone calls pleading for immediate deliveries of coal [...] many factories have had to close down or cut back production through lack of fuel.”<sup>82</sup> Warning the mining industry that “once there is any weakening or giving way to illegal strikes or political pressure, industry and the whole country would suffer enormously”, the Minister of Mines urged big companies to make every effort to employ local labour, thus anticipating already the impending post-colonial constellation of Northern Rhodesia/Zambia.<sup>83</sup>

Nor was the Chamber of Mines backward in coming forward. Addressing a gathering of mining companies in April, the Chamber’s president reaffirmed its commitment to “the policy of multi-racial trade unions and to the full use of the Industrial Conciliation Act and the machinery which it provides”. “But as things stand in Southern Rhodesia at present”, he explained,

[...] any unofficial strike is bound to have a substantial political content and even if in individual cases this is untrue, the professional agitator will always leap to exploit such a situation. I therefore wish to make it absolutely clear that the mining industry will make no concessions in the face of illegal strikes and I believe we have the full backing of the Government in taking up this position.<sup>84</sup>

The situation at that time, in which the mining industry as a whole employed 40,000 people, of whom some 68 per cent were foreigners, could

79. *Rhodesia Herald*, 10 March 1964.

80. *Ibid.*, 7 March 1964. See also, *Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly Debates* (Salisbury, 1965), 6 March 1964, Ministerial Statement on Wankie Strike.

81. *Citizen*, March 1964.

82. *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 11 March 1964.

83. *Rhodesia Herald*, 8 April 1964.

84. *Chamber of Mines Journal*, 6:4 (April 1964).

not continue. Rising unemployment in Southern Rhodesia and the sizeable wage bill being sent outside the country "would force the mining industry to review the position".<sup>85</sup> That moment came sooner rather than later. Even before Zambia became independent in October 1964, stricter immigration controls were imposed on the Zambian and Bechuanaland (Botswana) borders, resulting in a considerable reduction in the amount of migrant labour coming into Southern Rhodesia from those two countries and from Tanzania. As "lashers", that is, unskilled miners who shovelled coal, had traditionally come from north of the Zambezi River, the new government policy of restricting employment as far as possible to indigenous labour caused the colliery some difficulty. By the end of the year, it was reported as having been obliged by the new immigration restrictions "to enlist the aid of the Rhodesian African Labour Supply Commission to recruit labour for the colliery from the south eastern area of Rhodesia".<sup>86</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

According to *Drum* magazine, the strike was easy enough to explain:

In air-conditioned offices and a hilltop hotel, a small army of embarrassed "experts" puzzled out how this strike was launched without any warning, sending the industrialist scurrying to his coal bunker to check on reserves. The answer was written on every lavatory wall. "Vote UNIP. Zambia is UNIP", it said in chalk and paint. Wankie, 60 miles inside Southern Rhodesia, is a UNIP town with most of its 4,000 labour force from across the border. Now Zambia is almost independent and Wankie is still the bitter underpaid place it was long before the last vicious 1954 strike.<sup>87</sup>

*Drum's* sharp-eyed account unquestionably captured the crucial transnational political dimension of the strike. Neither its wider context nor the settler state's harsh reaction is intelligible without it.

As noted above, there is some evidence that officials of the Northern Rhodesian Mineworkers' Union (NRMU) were seen around the colliery's No. 2 compound in the days immediately preceding demonstrations over rations, and the unambiguous oral testimony of several women that UNIP members urged them to march on the offices of the compound manager. This is supported by newspaper reports and at length by Bloomfield's first-hand account of the strike written for the AMR's executive council. Every observer remarked on the singing of UNIP slogans by many in the crowds and the prominent display on clothing of UNIP badges.<sup>88</sup> This close association

85. *Rhodesia Herald*, 8 April 1964.

86. NAZ Library, *The Chamber of Mines of Rhodesia, 1964 Annual Report*; and NAZ Library, *Report of the Chief Government Mining Engineer, Inspector of Mines and Explosives, 1964*.

87. *Drum*, April 1964, p. 32.

88. See, especially, AMR Papers, Report "Wankie Colliery Strike", p. 3.

between labour, organized and unorganized, and militant nationalist politics contradicts studies that have insisted that the relationship was fraught where it was not openly antagonistic.<sup>89</sup> Whatever divisions there may have been between the NRMU and UNIP on the Copperbelt were subsumed elsewhere at this time. More than this, it suggests that greater weight should be given to those instances when women activists in particular played leading roles in the politicization of African mining communities.<sup>90</sup>

The highly charged political atmosphere meant that from beginning to end the strike at Wankie was as much a confrontation about autonomy and respect as it was a dispute about terms of employment. The independently minded *Citizen* monthly news-sheet captured this perfectly. Summing up the strike, it explained that “the miners, it seems, are paid a certain wage in money and given food to the amount of £5, which money [...] is deducted from their wage”. For the *Citizen* it was obvious that once the miners wanted their full wages in money, the colliery’s management should have acceded to their request immediately.

It is unheard of, even in Africa, that an employer should decree what his employee should eat. The employee earns his money by labour and he should be given the right to do just what he likes with it, he should especially have a choice of what goes down his throat.<sup>91</sup>

At the same time, grievances about conditions of service were inflamed not least because they were needlessly and heedlessly aggravated by the colliery company. “At the Wankie colliery the workers have got agreement to their demand for an end to the system whereby rations form part of their wages”, commented Northern Rhodesia’s national daily. “Since the [parent] company involved, Anglo American, agreed to this a year ago on the Copperbelt, it is hard to believe that they would not have conceded the point at Wankie too, without a strike to emphasize that the miners meant business.”<sup>92</sup> Already, at the time of the 1954 strike, both food rations and so-called tribal elders had been sources of conflict.<sup>93</sup> Neither was addressed by the Company in the ensuing decade. Instead, the system of food rations was extended in the latter half of the 1950s as part of Wankie’s pursuit of increased efficiency. Ultimately, this ensured that trouble in the compounds would involve everyone: men, women, and children.

89. For example, Bates, *Unions, Parties, and Political Development*, pp. 126–200; and Berger, *Labour, Race and Colonial Rule*, pp. 161–164 and 211–217.

90. See, especially, Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, ch. 1, “‘Freedom and Labour’: The Text of Foster Mubanga”.

91. *Citizen*, March 1964.

92. *Northern News*, 11 March 1964.

93. Phimister, “Lashers and Leviathan”, pp. 179, 184–185.

The prominent part played by women in the 1954 strike was more than replicated in 1964. At least as politicized as their menfolk, if not more so, six out of ten members of a strikers' delegation were women. Of particular note was the blurring of boundaries between private and public spheres. The fact that responsibility for household reproduction rested on women's shoulders placed special significance on the prompt and regular preparation of meals for men coming off shift. When this domestic routine was upset by the corrupt and irregular distribution of food, as well as threatened by the poor quality of such meat rations as did occasionally become available, it thrust women into direct confrontation with the colliery management. The action they took was immediate and violent, even if "reactive rather than proactive".<sup>94</sup>

Yet clashes also found expression through political mobilization and party slogans. The anti-colonial possibilities framed by UNIP were as attractive to women as they were to men. What Valerie Hall has found in her study about women in mining communities also holds true here: "mining women being, at one and the same time, the most domestic of working-class women and the most politically conscious".<sup>95</sup> Women's struggles over food and politics in mining communities remote in place and time from each other shared many similarities then. While no record has survived of colliery women working as UNIP activists, certainly nothing comparable to women's party roles on the Copperbelt from the late 1950s onwards, it does seem likely that black women rallied to party political calls.<sup>96</sup>

At the same time, the colliery company persisted in its belief that migrant labourers acted as tribesmen rather than as workers or miners. Ignoring all evidence to the contrary during and after the 1954 strike, a memorandum by the company the following year to the National Industrial Council of the Mining Industry asserted that:

Native labour on any given mine is never homogenous, but [...] consists of members of a varying number of tribes, each of which is quite foreign to the other and speaks a different language. The present system takes account of this state of affairs, and of the primitive natives' natural inclination to act in concert with his

94. Hall, *Women at Work*, p. 78.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

96. For the Copperbelt, see especially Harries-Jones, *Freedom and Labour*, *passim*. More generally see Jane L. Parpart, "The Household and the Mine Shaft: Gender and Class Struggles on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1926-64", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13 (1986), pp. 36-56. See also George Chauncey, Jr, "The Locus of Reproduction: Women's Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927-1953", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7 (1981), pp. 135-164. Among recent unpublished studies, see F. Sakala, "The Role of Women in Labour Stabilisation at Mufulira Mine, 1930 to 1964" (M.A. thesis, University of Zambia, 2001); and B. Dandule, "Women and Mineworkers' Struggles on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1926-1964" (M.A. thesis, University of Zambia, 2012).

fellow tribesmen, which it is claimed is the only true “collective” which the tribal native understands.<sup>97</sup>

But this was manifestly not the case, as any number of studies have demonstrated for west, central, and southern Africa.<sup>98</sup> No ethnic or linguistic differences divided the colliery’s black miners during the strike. Black miners were united in their rejection of the “tribal rulers” foisted on them by the colliery company. Women who had come to Wankie from all over central Africa participated in the strike.<sup>99</sup> At the colliery, people from throughout Zambia came together in the same burial society, “Cigwilizano”. One miner declared: “I forgot whether I was Lozi or no Lozi”.<sup>100</sup> Nor did any other “tribal” issues shape the course of the strike.

Although one report speculated that trouble had been stirred up by “a pool of 500 unemployed men at the mine, who are called upon when there is any shortage of labour – they created the trouble with a view to stepping into full-time jobs”,<sup>101</sup> the most telling division was not between employed and unemployed, but between black and white. Different black ethnic groups might all get along together in the colliery’s various compounds or “villages”, but white and black miners lived rigidly segregated lives. Relations at the workplace were tense, if less fraught than in the past. They certainly lent themselves to strike-breaking, as blacks saw it, or to the maintenance of essential services, as whites viewed it. For all that they were both bounded by patriarchy, the different spaces inhabited by the wives of white and black miners precluded anything remotely approaching sisterhood. If anything, racial attitudes were hardening at this time and place in central Africa. The narrow remit of liberal multiracialism precluded class solidarity as much as the unfolding ambition of African nationalism was to eschew it. In a polarized world of black and white nationalisms soon to be locked in mortal combat, miners’ struggles were invariably racialized.

97. AMR Papers, “Memorandum Submitted to the Select Committee Appointed by the Southern Rhodesian Parliament on the Native Industrial Workers Union Bill by the National Industrial Council of the Mining Industry”, 1955, p. 20.

98. See also in this same Special Issue, Carolyn A. Brown, “Locals and Migrants in the Coalmining Town of Enugu (Nigeria): Worker Protest and Urban Identity 1914–1929”; Van Onselen, “Black Workers in Central African Industry”; and Michael Burawoy, *The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines: From African Advancement to Zambianization* (Lusaka, 1972).

99. Interview, Saela Mulemba, 2 March 1991.

100. Interview, A. Kwibisa, 6 April 1990.

101. *Rhodesia Herald*, 7 March 1964.